

I claim:

1. A method performed by a software agent of a first entity measuring the exposure of an individual to electronic media, said method comprising the steps of:

5 obtaining information identifying said electronic media from a cooperative media handler provided by a second entity using a defined interface that provides interoperability between said software agent and said cooperative media handler; and

providing at least a portion of said identifying information to said first entity measuring the exposure of said individual to said electronic media.

10 2. The method according to claim 1, wherein said individual is chosen for the individual's demographics and has agreed to participate in a research panel to have the individual's exposure to and interactions with said electronic media measured.

15 3. The method of claim 1, wherein said individual is part of an audience.

4. The method of claim 1, wherein said individual is part of a research panel chosen as a sample to statistically represent a larger population.

20 5. The method of claim 1, further comprising the steps of identifying and authenticating said individual.

6. The method according to claim 1, wherein said information identifying said electronic media further comprises information identifying said individual.

25 7. The method according to claim 1, wherein said information identifying said electronic media includes an identification tag.

30 8. The method according to claim 1, wherein said information identifying said electronic media includes metadata.

9. The method according to claim 1, wherein said information identifying said electronic media includes presentation information.

5 10. The method according to claim 1, wherein said information identifying said electronic media includes contextual information made available to the cooperative media handler by its host.

10 11. The method according to claim 1, wherein said information identifying said electronic media provided by said cooperative media handler includes information about the interactions of said individual with said electronic media.

12. The method of claim 1, wherein said information identifying said electronic media includes an identifier of said cooperative media handler.

13. The method of claim 1, wherein said information identifying said electronic media includes an identifier of the host of said cooperative media handler.

14. The method of claim 1, wherein said cooperative media handler decodes and presents said electronic media obtained from a wired network connection.

15. The method of claim 1, wherein said cooperative media handler decodes and presents said electronic media obtained from a wireless network connection.

25 16. The method of claim 1, wherein said cooperative media handler presents said electronic media generated in real-time.

17. The method of claim 1, wherein said cooperative media handler is a software component that temporarily extends the capabilities of its host to present media.

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18. The method of claim 1, wherein said cooperative media handler is a persistent software component that extends the capabilities of a software application to present media objects of a particular media type to an individual.

5 19. The method of claim 1, wherein said cooperative media handler is a persistent software component that extends the capabilities of an operating system to present media objects of a particular media type to an individual.

20. The method of claim 1, wherein said cooperative media handler is mobile.

10 21. The method of claim 1, wherein said cooperative media handler is stable.

22. The method of claim 1, wherein said cooperative media handler decodes and presents said electronic media, obtains information about said electronic media, and makes said information about said electronic media available for collection by said software agent, by means of said cooperative media handler's host.

23. The method according to claim 1, wherein said cooperative media handler may be remotely configured to specify which portions of said information identifying said electronic media to obtain and provide to said software agent.

24. The method of claim 1, wherein said cooperative media handler decodes and presents said electronic media obtained from a local storage device.

25 25. The method of claim 1, wherein said cooperative media handler decodes and presents pre-recorded electronic media.

26. The method of claim 1, wherein said cooperative media handler generates media experiences in real-time.

27. The method of claim 1, wherein said cooperative media handler is hosted within a device selected from the group consisting of: an Internet-enabled device, a set-top box, a television, a telephone, a pager and a personal digital assistant.

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28. The method of claim 1, wherein said software agent is not proximal to the physical environment of said individual.

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29. The method of claim 1, wherein said software agent is hosted within a smartcard associated with said individual.

30. The method of claim 1, wherein said software agent is hosted by an online service.

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31. The method of claim 1, wherein said software agent and said cooperative media handler are hosted separately.

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32. The method of claim 1, wherein said software agent logs said information identifying said electronic media.

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33. The method according to claim 1, wherein said software agent filters said information identifying said electronic media, such that only a portion of said information identifying said electronic media is provided to said first entity.

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34. The method according to claim 1, further comprising the step of providing a software agent for each computing device utilized by a given panel member.

35. The method of claim 1, wherein said software agent obtains said information identifying said electronic media by receiving a communication from said cooperative media handler.

36. The method of claim 1, wherein said software agent obtains said information identifying said electronic media by retrieving said information identifying said electronic media made available by said cooperative media handler.

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37. The method of claim 1, wherein said defined interface includes an application programming interface (API).

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38. The method of claim 1, wherein said defined interface includes a communications protocol.

39. The method of claim 1, wherein said defined interface includes a secure communications protocol.

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40. The method of claim 1, wherein said defined interface includes an interface between said software agent and its host.

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41. The method of claim 1, wherein said defined interface includes an application programming interface (API) between said software agent and its host.

42. The method of claim 1, wherein said defined interface includes a communications protocol between the host of said software agent and the host of said cooperative media handler.

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43. The method of claim 1, wherein said defined interface includes an interface between said cooperative media handler and its host.

44. The method of claim 1, wherein said defined interface includes an application programming interface (API) between said cooperative media handler and its host.

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45. The method of claim 1, wherein said electronic media is part of a video game.

46. The method of claim 1, wherein said electronic media includes an electronic media object.

5 47. The method of claim 1, wherein said electronic media is a software component.

48. The method of claim 1, wherein said electronic media is presented using an Internet-enabled device.

10 49. A method for measuring the exposure of an individual to electronic media, said method comprising the steps of:

tracking said individual with at least one software agent, said software agent obtaining presentation information from a cooperative media handler by means of a defined interface that provides interoperability between said software agent and said cooperative media handler, whereby said cooperative media handler presents electronic media to said individual, gathers information about said media presentations and provides said presentation information to said software agent by means of said defined interface; and

receiving at least a portion of said presentation information from said software agent.

50. A method performed by a software process performing data collection tasks on behalf of a first entity measuring the exposure of an individual to electronic media, said method comprising the steps of:

obtaining information identifying said electronic media from a cooperative media handler provided by a second entity using a defined interface that provides interoperability between said software process and said cooperative media handler; and

providing at least a portion of said identifying information to said first entity measuring the exposure of said individual to said electronic media.

51. A method for measuring the exposure of an individual to electronic media, said method comprising the steps of:

tracking said individual with at least one software process performing data collection tasks, said software process obtaining presentation information from a cooperative media handler by means of a defined interface that provides interoperability between said software process and said cooperative media handler, whereby said cooperative media handler presents electronic media to said individual, gathers information about said media presentations and provides said presentation information to said software process by means of said defined interface; and

receiving at least a portion of said presentation information from said software process.